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ABSTRACT

Researchers worked with French, Japanese, and Spanish immersion teachers in metropolitan Washington, DC elementary schools (grades 1-6) to implement language learning strategies in their classrooms. Workshops, materials, and observations were provided for professional support. Teachers were debriefed on the effectiveness of the teacher training and on the impact of strategies of instruction on their students through workshop evaluation forms and individual interviews. The paper reports on teachers' opinions regarding strategies instruction. The following research questions are addressed: (1) What types of teacher development can support strategies instruction for language immersion classrooms? Here it was concluded that the initial training workshop was very useful, as is the opportunity for peer observation of the implementation of new strategies. Teacher ownership of the strategies is very important, so there needs to be a convincing rationale of its effectiveness. (2) Do immersion teachers believe that strategies instruction improves their students' language learning? Teachers found that the new instructional and learning strategies improved student motivation; made students more aware, active, efficient, and responsible learners; and gave students a better understanding of the target language and made them more capable of working independently. "Teaching Interview Guides" and a story, "Sachiko: A Very Good Thinker," a tool for introducing strategies, are included in 2 appendices. (KFT)

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NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY/CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS IMMERSION TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION

Overview

Researchers worked with French, Japanese, and Spanish immersion teachers to implement language learning strategies instruction in their classrooms. Workshops, materials, and observations were provided for professional support. Teachers were debriefed on the effectiveness of the teacher training and on the impact of strategies instruction on their students through workshop evaluation forms and individual interviews. This paper reports on teachers' opinions regarding strategies instruction. The following research questions are addressed:

1) What types of teacher development can support strategies instruction for language immersion classrooms?
2) Do immersion teachers believe that strategies instruction improves their students language learning?

Teacher Participants

Teachers were drawn from local school districts in the Washington DC-Virginia Metropolitan area. Participants included six French teachers and six Japanese teachers representing grades 1-6, as well as four Spanish teachers from grades 1-4. As participation was voluntary, teachers determined the extent of their involvement. Some teachers elected to participate in the workshops but not in the interviews or classroom observations.

Instruments and Analyses

Workshops. Professional development workshops for learning strategies instruction were provided to all teachers (one workshop for the Japanese and Spanish immersion programs and two

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for the French immersion program) during 1994 -96. The content of these workshops/seminars was developed based on informal assessments of teachers' needs (e.g., discussions with teachers and program coordinators). In the workshops, researchers provided teachers with rationales for the importance of teaching strategies, examples of immersion students' strategies use, materials in the target language for introducing the concept of strategies to students, suggestions for integrating strategies in immersion course work, and an opportunity to develop a strategies-based lesson. Teacher evaluations of workshops provided information about critical aspects of the workshops, as well as additional professional development needs. Evaluation comments were typed and categorized to identify key points.

Teacher interviews. In Spring 1995, teachers participated in interviews regarding the impact learning strategies instruction had on students, as well as teachers' professional development needs. The interviews, lasting from 20 to 30 minutes, were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Responses were then categorized by question for analysis. The interview guide (See Appendix A) consisted mostly of open-ended questions.

Results

Research Question 1: What types of teacher development can support strategies instruction for language immersion classrooms?

Results from workshop evaluations. Each workshop held for participating teachers included an evaluation component in which teachers completed evaluation materials concerning its effectiveness. Table 1 summarizes their responses.

Table 1
Immersion Teachers' Evaluations of Workshop Organized by Topics

Most useful:
Suggestions on how to explicitly teach strategies
Suggestions for identifying students' strategies
Working with a partner to integrate strategies in a lesson
Materials and Handouts
Tips on enabling students to explain their thoughts in the target language
Using practical examples in workshop
Suggestions for improving the workshop:
Reduce the number of strategies
More hands-on activities
More information on how strategies improve student's learning

Teachers indicated that the idea of teaching strategies explicitly, in other words, talking to students about how they learn and naming and defining specific learning strategies, was the most useful component of the workshop. Most of the teachers indicated that they had previously taught strategies but may have done so implicitly. They had presented and practiced materials with students using good teaching strategies to help students master the material, but they did not always inform students explicitly about strategies students could use for learning language in the classroom and on their own. The workshop enabled teachers to take the necessary steps towards explicit instruction.

Workshop teacher-participants also felt that the materials provided by the researchers were useful. The material viewed by teachers as most useful was a story of a mountain climber used to introduce the idea of strategies to younger children. Researchers had previously developed a strategies model for older students called "The Model of Strategic Comprehension and Production." In this model individual learning strategies were grouped according to the four processes: Plan, Regulate, Problem-solve, and Evaluate. Picture icons were used to represent the four processes (e.g,

a daily calender planner for Plan; a thermostat for Regulate; a tool-box for Problem-solve; and a check mark for Evaluate). While these were effective icons for older students, younger students needed a more understandable strategies model. So researchers developed a story in which the idea of the four processes and strategies were embedded. In the story the mountain climber plans before her trip, monitors as she climbs, problem-solves when she comes to a deep wide stream, and evaluates herself upon reaching the top of the mountain. The story was translated into French, Japanese and Spanish. Most of the immersion teachers opted to use this story in their class. For many classes, the mountain climber became a symbol for how to work through a learning task. (See Appendix B for the mountain climber story.)

Results from teacher interviews. When asked what kinds of learning strategies professional development support was most useful, most teachers responded that the initial workshop was crucial in providing a basic understanding of strategies instruction. As one teacher said about the workshop, "When you can see how it's done by somebody else, then you can do it or you can have more ideas of how to go about doing it your own way." Although few teachers felt that a workshop alone was enough to give them adequate professional support to teach strategies, they did feel it was a necessary first step. Other teachers explained that just as students have to become aware of learning strategies, teachers also need to consciously know when and where to apply the strategies. The workshop helped teachers to figure out how to teach strategies more systematically.

The interviews illuminated specific types of professional development and aids that would assist them in becoming more confident strategies teachers. For instance, they would have liked more opportunities to observe other immersion teachers teaching strategies through video-tape or peer

modeling. While researchers attempted to pair teachers to be resources to each other, often class schedules did not allow time for peer observation. Teachers would also have liked more strategies materials in their target language that would be ready to use in the classroom. Strategies materials preparation took a lot of their time because their existing materials did not contain explicit language learning strategies explanations. Many teachers also indicated that it would be useful to have guidelines on matching strategies and grade levels. In this way, teachers would know which strategies to teach for their class and, if the instruction was organized within a school-wide curriculum, they would know which strategies students had already learned. Through such coordination strategy names could also be used consistently across grades.

Finally, the teacher interviews highlighted the importance of teacher ownership of strategies instruction. Teachers needed to be firmly convinced that the instruction was beneficial for it to be effective. As one teacher said the following:

> I think strategies instruction helps the students if we really believe in it. If we don't believe in it and really use it ourselves and tell them to keep using it, it's not really going to help them. But if we really believe in it, then maybe they will use it as a part of their learning also. That's what I think is the whole business. If we can't believe in it and really show them what a difference it makes, then it won't make any difference.

Thus the importance of professional development activities is not only to give teachers an understanding of how to implement strategies instruction, but to provide a convincing rationale of its effectiveness. It is hoped that the current research described in this report, as well as future research and teacher experience, can help convince teachers of the difference strategies instruction can have on their students.

Research Question 2: Do immersion teachers believe that strategies instruction improves their students language learning?

In the teacher interviews we focused on the second research question asking French, Japanese and Spanish teachers what evidence they had that strategies instruction was helping and why it was helping. In response to these questions, teachers cited a variety of positive impacts that strategies instruction was having on their students and on their instruction. Table 2 summarizes these responses.

Table 2
Teachers' Perceptions of Effects of Strategies Instruction

POSITIVE IMPACTS LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION HAD ON STUDENTS:
Strategies instruction is effective.
Strategies instruction improves motivation.
Students are more active, aware, responsible as learners—higher quality thinkers.
Students have better understanding of the target language.
Students are more efficient learners.
Students independently use strategies and strategy terms.
Students are able to justify their work.
POSITIVE IMPACTS ON TEACHERS:
Learning strategies instruction makes my instruction more efficient.
Learning strategies instruction helps me teach better (general impact).
REASONS LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION WORKS
Strategies are lifelong skills that are useful across content areas.
Strategies instruction teaches children how to think.
Strategies instruction gives students a variety of tools for learning.

All of the teachers interviewed reported that strategies instruction was effective. When asked why it was effective, teachers described concrete applications in their classes. For example, the strategies enabled students to think about how they learn and to be able to make conscious decisions

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about their learning techniques. Students' attitudes shifted from giving up on a difficult task to trying another strategy to solve the problem. Students were able to think about how they reached their answer and even if their answer was not correct, students came to realize that by thinking about their approaches for learning they may be able to do it differently and better next time. The following two quotes from teachers illustrate how strategies helped students become more active and responsible learners.

> Especially when working on a computer or reading a new book, they didn't do it before, saying "I can't read this Kanji, teacher." But now they use such strategies as 'look up in your notes' or 'ask someone who knows' or 'look it up in the dictionary.'... When they don't understand what I'm saying right away, they now ask if they can discuss in groups... and so now sometimes the class proceeds really children-centered.... And when the teacher is conscious in teaching the strategies, children also become conscious of them and can start to use them the next time, so I think strategies are very important and good to teach.

> I remember a child who said, "Madame, ... I want to show my strategy to the class, but I didn't get the answer." And I said "No, no, we can't do that now." I was in such a hurry.... And the child said "But Madame, you always say that it is... the most important, to see why you have not found the right answer....And now what's happened?" It was very interesting to see that the children themselves had come to assume this responsibility for knowing how they learn. It is superb.

In addition to creating more active learners, teachers reported that strategies instruction increased students' learning independence. Students were able to name strategies and give rationales for using them. They could choose strategies appropriate for specific learning tasks. Teachers thought that providing learning tools to students also helped their own teaching techniques as the following quote indicates:

> I believe that learning strategies are a learning tool for my students, and it gives them different ways they can learn a certain skill or concept.... I believe that it has impacted my students tremendously and my teaching as well.... I definitely think it helps students become more

> effective language learners because at least when I use strategies in the classroom, I ask them to express why they used that strategy, why that strategy helps them.... For example, [after a unit on spiders, then a reading about butterflies]... I asked them to go into their learning logs and compare two things about the butterflies and spiders.... Two students did a table and one of them did a Venn diagram. I stopped the lesson immediately because I thought that was wonderful! We do Venn diagrams over and over again and I think that is a wonderful strategy, and we do tables but they have never had to do it on their own and I didn't ask them to. So that is one thing I said, that is one strategy that these three students have used to do the same thing you are doing in narrative. They had to talk about why is was good to use the Venn diagram.

Although this research focused specifically on language learning strategies, it is difficult to separate content learning (math, science, etc.) from language in an immersion setting because students learn the language through the content. In the interviews, it became clear that the language learning strategies instruction impacted not only language but other subject areas as well.

> In teaching everything, how to read, how to write, math, how to do experiment in science and how to obtain results from observation, I think these cannot be done without teaching them the strategies. Because, I think what seems to be the most important as a teacher is teaching children how to think.... More than half the class now bring up the story of Sachiko-san [the mountain climber] when solving a problem. And I told students they can use their own names instead of Sachiko after two or three times they brought up the story.

Finally, perhaps the most important reported impact of strategies instruction was on students' attitudes towards learning. Teachers indicated that strategies gave students, especially some of the weaker students, motivation to learn more. One teacher said that she could see her students reduce their affective state to take greater risks in learning.

> I think there is a big difference [with strategies instruction]... it is the attitude of the students... towards their own education.... The children who do not have strategies...think sometimes...that they cannot learn.... At the end of the year I see that the children are a little more relaxed, and they take chances in class. Because they have finished by believing that really... there is no one who knows everything.... Knowledge is exterior. Now they dare, all you need is to have the tools to learn. And when they have that attitude, you can't stop them.

Teachers reported a wide variety of positive effects on students, and on themselves as teachers. They believed that learning strategies made them more effective as teachers and made their instruction more efficient. Teachers believed that learning strategies instruction works because it gives students a variety of lifelong tools for learning that are useful across content areas.

Based on teacher feedback, strategies instruction seems to have a positive impact in classrooms. Perhaps the most convincing rationale is that these teachers are continuing their work with language learning strategies and are continuing to develop effective strategies instruction. Through strategies instruction, these teachers are providing their students with tools that enable them to become independent learners and thinkers.

APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDES

Teacher Interview Guide--Spring 1995

Be sure to tape identifying information--
interviewer, teacher, school, date/year.

You've been participating in strategies instruction research for awhile now, and we would like your input on how it has been working. The main question I want to ask is:

What kinds of impact, if any, has learning strategies instruction had on your students?

After teacher is finished talking about impact, ask:

Do you think strategies instruction helps students become more effective language learners?

*If teacher says **yes**, ask:*

What evidence has shown you that strategies instruction is working for your students?

In your opinion, why has strategies instruction helped your students?

*If teacher says **no**, ask:*

What evidence has shown you that strategies instruction is not working for your students?

In your opinion, why has strategies instruction not helped your students?

We're also interested in addressing teachers' specific needs for professional development with strategies instruction. What we would like to know from you is:

What **language-specific** teacher development is necessary in learning to teach strategies?

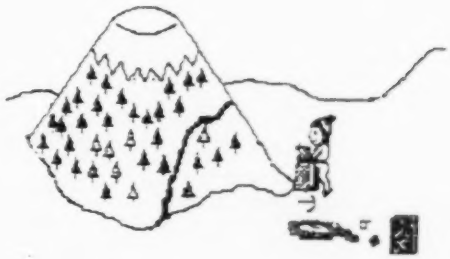
What **level-specific** teacher development is necessary in learning to teach strategies?

Thanks so much for your input and your work with strategies. Your participation is vital to helping us understand and improve language instruction.

APPENDIX B
INTRODUCING STRATEGIES: MOUNTAIN CLIMBER STORY

Sachiko: A Very Good Thinker

Meet Sachiko.
Sachiko is a very good thinker. She uses her mind to help her do all the things she wants to do.



Sachiko wants to climb Mt. Fuji. Mt. Fuji is very big. It will be a very long trip. Sachiko will have to think hard to climb the mountain. But Sachiko is a very good thinker. She knows that before she can start to climb Mt. Fuji, she has to PLAN for the trip.

Before her trip, Sachiko has to decide how high she wants to climb.
She sets a goal: "I want to climb all the way to the top of Mt. Fuji!"

Sachiko knows a lot about Mt. Fuji.
Before her trip, she asks herself, "What do I remember about Mt. Fuji?"
She studies her map of trails to help her remember all the things she knows about Mt. Fuji.

Before her trip, Sachiko has to think about what she needs to pack in her backpack. She predicts what will happen on her long trip so she knows what to pack. She asks, "What might happen? I might get hungry; I'll pack some peanut butter. I might get thirsty; I'll pack some water. I might get cold; I'll pack a coat. I might get tired; I'll pack a blanket."

Sachiko decides to pay attention to hard parts of the climb. She asks, "What do I need to watch out for? I know there are some streams that I have to cross. I will watch out for them. I'll pack a rope to be ready for them."

Now Sachiko is ready to start climbing. Sachiko is a very good thinker. As she climbs, she needs to check how well she is doing. She needs to help herself so she can keep climbing.

Sachiko looks at the signs to see how far she has climbed.
She looks at her map to make sure she is on the right trail.

Sachiko asks herself questions to see if everything is ok:
She asks, "How am I doing?" "Am I tired?" "Am I thirsty?"

When she is climbing, Sachiko remembers what she knows about this mountain.
She thinks about what she does to help her climb other mountains.

Sachiko sees a picture of Mt. Fuji in her mind and thinks about what she has to do. She looks up to see how far she has to climb. "Am I almost there?"

When she gets scared, Sachiko tells herself "I can do it."

Sometimes Sachiko meets other climbers. They share climbing stories. They help each other.

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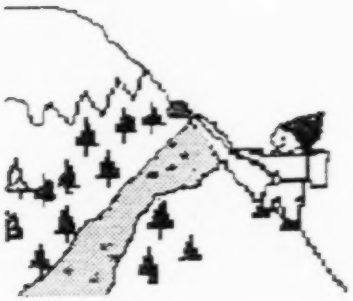
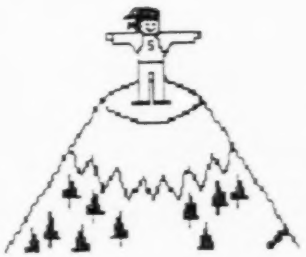
Sometimes climbing gets difficult.
There are streams to cross.
There are big cliffs.
There are strong winds.
But Sachiko is a very good thinker.
She can solve her problems.
When Sachiko comes to the stream, she needs to choose how to solve her problem.
What could Sachiko do?
She could use the map to find another trail.
She could ask another climber to help her walk across.
She could think about how she crosses other streams.
Sachiko will use her rope to get across the big stream.



Because Sachiko is a very good thinker, she thinks about how well she did.
After she crosses the stream, Sachiko asks herself,
"Was my rope a good tool to cross the stream?
Should I use a rope next time I cross the stream?"



Sachiko thinks and climbs, thinks and climbs.
Finally, she reaches the top of Mt. Fuji!
Sachiko is very happy.
She looks around and thinks about her climb.
She thinks about everything she did to help her climb Mt. Fuji.
She asks herself, "How well did I do?"
"I packed enough water, but I would have liked more peanut butter.
I will remember next time."
"I used good tools to cross the stream."
"I learned about how to climb a new mountain."
"And most important, I met my goal."

Sachiko is a very good thinker.
She climbed all the way to the top of Mt. Fuji.